



To maximise children's life outcomes and guide their learning journey

Guidelines for applicants

Conducting research in C&K early childhood education and care

Contents

1. Introduction	3
Purpose of these guidelines	4
2. Who needs to complete an application?	4
Why review internal research	5
3. Application process	5
Submitting and processing the application	6
4. Review process.....	6
Benefit, value and strategic alignment	7
Methodology	7
Ethical design and conduct.....	7
Seeking informed consent and assent	8
Confidentiality and Privacy	9
Pre-existing relationships	9
Incentives	9
Researcher credentials	9
Burden	10
Reporting on research	10
Attachment 1 – C&K research and evaluation outcome areas	11
Attachment 2 – A good research proposal	12

1. Introduction

Established in 1907, C&K has a long history of innovation, high quality services and research activities which has led and informed C&K's priorities and best practice reforms. More recently, this has been enhanced by the appointment of a Manager, Research and Evaluation and the establishment of a Research and Evaluation Committee tasked with review and consideration of research applications. The Research and Evaluation Committee is comprised of C&K staff and external members with a knowledge and interest in research and early childhood education and care.

C&K is currently undertaking research across the spectrum of the six strategic priorities outlined in the *C&K Strategic Plan 2014 – 2017* including

- Innovation – deliver and grow innovative services and programs that meet the diverse needs of children
- Reconciliation – we honour Australia's First People and work towards reconciliation
- Access for all – increased access, participation and programs for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families
- Leadership – lead, influence and advocate in early childhood education and care
- People matter – A capable, engaged diverse workforce and high performance culture
- Sustainability – A well run, sustainable organisation.

In submitting an application form, applicants are encouraged to identify opportunities to link and align their proposals with

- C&K's Strategic Plan strategic priorities <http://www.candk.asn.au/> and
- C&K's Research Strategy outcome areas (refer to Attachment 1).

At C&K we are interested in research and evaluation which acquires and generates new knowledge, builds evidence-informed policy and practice over time, and shares knowledge with research partners for collective impact purposes.

C&K encourages high-quality research proposals which contribute to C&K's strategic priorities and aligns with C&K's research agenda. C&K also promotes partnerships, collaboration and co-design of research and evaluation projects and encourages prospective applicants to contact the Manager, Research and Evaluation, C&K to discuss their proposal *before* submitting an application.

C&K is committed to research which maintains and observes the highest ethical standards, ensures children's wellbeing and protects children from any potential harm in the conduct of research. Research and evaluation must also meet C&K's duty-of-care obligations and not contravene any policy or procedures relating to the safety and wellbeing of children, staff, and parents including compliance with required legislation such as privacy legislation. Where relevant, applicants should demonstrate approval for their proposal from their institution's University Human Research Ethics Committee or equivalent.

Purpose of these guidelines

These guidelines¹ seek to assist researchers and educators to prepare applications to conduct research in C&K early childhood settings and to access C&K owned-data for research purposes.

The guidelines, application form, checklist and suggested report template are available at <http://www.candk.asn.au/research>

2. Who needs to complete an application?

All external applicants must submit an application to C&K for approval where they intend to conduct research which involves access to a C&K early childhood education and care service, corporate office staff and/or C&K-owned data.

An external applicant may include but is not limited to

- Individual students undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate studies, as well as other students enrolled in other courses
- Universities and other research bodies
- Government departments
- Peak bodies and/or networks.

Please note that C&K staff who are wanting to undertake research in a student capacity to complete their studies, must apply as an external applicant.

C&K affiliates are not required to submit an application for approval of research projects. Each affiliate board or committee of management is responsible for approving their own research projects, independent of C&K. Affiliates will have access to resources to support research projects through the C&K intranet and are welcome to discuss potential research projects with the Manager, Research and Evaluation, C&K.

Internal applicants from C&K must submit an application for approval on:

- Any proposal where the foreseeable risk to participants is more than 'low risk' as defined by the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (NHMRC 2007) or which poses any level of risk to the early childhood site or to C&K as an organisation
- Studies which investigate sensitive issues e.g. mental health, harm of children, domestic and family violence, parenting and family issues, particular child management issues, use of medication for children, and cultural issues
- Research and evaluation that has been commissioned and funded by C&K, State and/or Australian Government
- Research being undertaken by C&K staff which involve multiple locations and/or is of a significant material value
- Research which involves access to databases where Privacy legislation principles apply
- Research which intends to submit findings to a scholarly publication.

¹ Parts of these guidelines have been adapted from 'Conducting research in Victorian government schools and early childhood settings', a publication of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, State Government of Victoria, January 2013. This document makes provision under the National Education Access Licence for Schools (NEALS) for 'an educational institution situated in Australia which is not conducted for profit, or a body responsible for administering such an institution may copy and communicate the materials, other than third party materials, for the educational purposes of the institution.'

If you are uncertain about whether or not you need to submit an application, please contact: research@candk.asn.au

Where a C&K educator is completing a single site action research project which has the approval of the relevant manager, the findings will not be published externally, is of low risk and not of a sensitive nature, an application does not need to be submitted. Researchers may still want to use the guidelines and application form to assist in preparing and forming their project proposal. Managers are asked to forward details of internal research projects not requiring an application, such as single site action research projects to the Manager Research and Evaluation on a six monthly basis to inform and update the Research Master Register. This enables tracking of the rich and diverse research program being undertaken at C&K.

Why review internal research?

C&K requires the research review process to apply to internal research projects as well as external projects for the following reasons

- Meet duty-of-care obligations to children and other responsibilities to parents and staff
- Assess the level of risk and have in place strategies to manage any risks that may arise during the research process
- Ensure compliance with accepted research standards aimed at research integrity and the ethical design and conduct of research
- Prevent duplication of research effort and/or partner with other researchers where research efficiencies and collaborations can be achieved across similar research topics/projects.

3. Application process

The application form must be completed so that the Research and Evaluation Committee can gain a full understanding of the research purpose, researchers involved, research participants, methodology and methods intended, identification of any potential risks and mitigation strategy, resourcing required, timelines and arrangements for confidentiality, privacy and data storage.

The application requests a range of attachments such as copies of the information sheets to participants, consent/assent forms, data collection tools, and if applicable ethical clearance documentation. In signing the application form, applicants are agreeing to adhere to provisions relating to privacy, insurance, C&K's policies and procedures and reporting requirements. Additionally, the agreement also asks applicants to agree or not agree to the publication of their final project report on C&K's Research and Evaluation Master Register and C&K's website.

It is necessary to note that

- Research participation may still depend on whether the C&K staff manager, such as director, or individual site, decides to opt-in to the research, given that all research processes in C&K are voluntary
- Approval by the Research and Evaluation Committee does not signify endorsement of a project, its outcomes or recommendations. Approval may only denote

permission to access data and/or a site and/or distribution of a request in a newsletter to participate in research

- Research involving a PhD candidate or similar where ethical clearance has not yet been sought, is unlikely to be considered for approval
- Research requesting access to C&K-owned data where that data may be commercial-in-confidence or relate to pre-existing intellectual property is unlikely to be released
- Where the research project has already been undertaken or significant amounts of data have been collected, the Research and Evaluation Committee will not issue retrospective approval.

Submitting and processing the application

Applications can take up to twelve weeks to process, depending on the date a fully completed application is received and when the Research and Evaluation Committee sits. The Research and Evaluation Committee is scheduled to meet four times per year, commencing meetings each year in February.

Electronic copies of the application (in Word format) are preferred, and can be sent to: research@candk.asn.au

Alternatively, post a hard copy to

Manager, Research and Evaluation, Business Development and Strategy
The Creche & Kindergarten Association Limited
257 Gympie Road, Kedron QLD 4031, Australia

Applications received will be provided with an email notification outlining - date received and registration number; and any aspects of the application which require attention such as omitted attachments. Once the application is fully complete, it will be submitted for review by the Research and Evaluation Committee.

An email will be sent regarding the outcome of the application once it has been reviewed. The email will outline high level reasons why the application was not recommended. There is no appeals process regarding decisions but researchers may update and/or amend their application and re-submit.

For further information

Contact the Manager Research and Evaluation at: research@candk.asn.au

4. Review process

The Research and Evaluation Committee will assess and review applications giving key consideration to the following criteria

- Benefit and value to C&K, research participants and the early childhood education and care sector generally
- Alignment with C&K strategic plan priorities and research agenda outcome areas
- Appropriateness of the methodology for the early childhood education and care setting
- Ethical design and conduct, which includes issues such as informed consent and assent, confidentiality, privacy and protection from harm

- Burden on educators and research participants, including the cost to the organisation of participating.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to read the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007*, and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, prior to completing their application. Particular attention is drawn to Chapter 4.2 of the National Statement which outlines ethical considerations with research involving children and young people. These documents can be found at

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/e72> and <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/r39>

Attachment 2 provides an outline by NHMRC on what constitutes a good research proposal.

Benefit, value and strategic alignment

In assessing the benefit, value and strategic alignment, the Research and Evaluation Committee will assess the application content against the criteria

- How the research project will benefit the research participants (e.g. children, parents, educators etc), C&K as a major provider of early childhood education and care services, and if relevant the broader early childhood education and care sector.
- How the research project will advance knowledge or practice based information about the education, developmental needs and care of children, or other matters relevant to children and childhood. If the intended benefits are a contribution to theory and/or a concept/s, then the applicant needs to explain how this will be translated to practice.
- How the research topic aligns with C&K's strategic plan priorities and C&K's research outcome areas. *Note in some circumstances the alignment may be across more than one strategic priority and/or research outcome area.*

Methodology

Researchers need to outline what are the research question/s they are seeking to answer, alternatively what is the logic schema (outcomes sought, sources of data, data collection method, analysis approach) to their research proposal. Other factors to consider are

- the sample size, how many participants will be involved
- the time required for each activity
- the development stages with details of how frequently the researcher will need to visit the site
- the timeline for the research with precise commencement and end dates.

Ethical design and conduct

C&K takes its obligations to deliver on research integrity and ethics seriously.

The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC) states that all research that involves more than low risk should be reviewed by a formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee. Risk is defined as 'a potential for harm, discomfort or

inconvenience'. Research is 'low risk' where the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort. Where the risk, even if unlikely, is more serious than discomfort, the research is not low risk (Section 2, 2.1.6 NHMRC, National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007).

Applications from students and universities are likely to have already undergone formal ethics review. This approval and the period of approval must be attached to the application.

Seeking informed consent and assent

For applicants who have not undergone formal ethics review (this includes most internal applicants), the applicant needs to justify how the conduct of the research will provide for the for the child's safety, emotional and psychological security, and wellbeing. Additionally the research proposal needs to outline the process for seeking informed consent, whether this is from the parent and/or guardian and/or if and how the child will be involved in that process. C&K is more likely to favour a process of assent from the child. In circumstances where the child is being asked to consent to research, the capacity of the child to provide their consent needs to be discussed in the application.

C&K will only approve participation in research that is entirely voluntary. Research participants do not have to provide a reason for not participating in research processes. Participants may withdraw from the research process at any time. Should a child not wish to engage in the research process, even where the parent or guardian has provided consent, the child's preference must be enacted and alternative and equivalent activities offered for the child/ren. Educators and researchers will need to plan for possible non-participation of children and how this will be resourced. The obligation to provide resourcing for alternative activities should be on the researcher in the first instance.

For internal applicants, whilst C&K is moving towards standing parental consent for specific low risk research processes, active consent from parents is still preferred in most research settings. Research participants must be provided with adequate and understandable information on the research scope and purpose, and the benefits and risks associated with participating to provide informed consent. This is particularly important when research is being conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and/or culturally and linguistically diverse communities. If relevant to the type of research, information sheets must outline what will occur in the circumstance that a child may disclose abuse or neglect, or be at risk of harm.

Copies of the intended consent and assent forms/processes need to be provided with the application. Where verbal consent is being sought, this must be recorded and a record retained. Where assent is being sought this must be in child friendly language and an accessible format. Where a researcher prefers a child to provide informed consent, the rationale for this must be clearly stated.

Where a research project is videotaping, photographing, filming, audio-taping or any other media recording, participants must be fully informed of this and provide specific consent. The purpose to which the photographs or recordings are to be used in the future must be fully explained and in what context, such as the internet. Participants should be provided with options of full recognition or pixel obscuring if appearance is captured accidentally. For internal applicants, whilst C&K makes standing parental consent provision in the enrolment form for images and recordings, this should not be taken for granted, and consent for each specific research project must be sought.

Where a project may operate over a long time frame, it is recommended that consent be renewed regularly to provide the participant with the choice to review their circumstances

and ongoing commitment. This is particularly important where the focus of the project may alter, even where the changes may appear minimal.

Once approved, as a courtesy, where research is to be conducted at a specific early childhood site, it is requested that the researcher emails the Manager, Research and Evaluation to inform C&K that this research process has commenced at the site.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Applicants should protect and respect participant's right to privacy, confidentiality and make every effort for data to be non-identifying. Researchers must comply with the requirements of the *Information Privacy Act 2009* and national privacy principles.

Researchers also need to understand the requirements of State and Commonwealth legislation and complying with relevant legislation, including retention, storage and disposal of research records.

The NHMRC, *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* states that in general, the minimum recommended period for retention of research data is 5 years from the date of publication. Under the Queensland State Archives, *University Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule*, records relating to human services consent obtained from individuals to participate in research activities must be retained for 15 years after the project has concluded. Records may include consent notices, records of suitability card for interviewing juveniles and signed consent. Even though C&K is not a university, this requirement sets the standard across the research field.

Applicants must also consider issues related to confidentiality and privacy of the research process and data and information collected. Where data is to be stored off-shore, participants must be advised of this.

Pre-existing relationships

Internal applicants need to consider their pre-existing relationships with participants and researchers and whether this may compromise the research process both in terms of seeking consent and where an educator is involved in the data collection process whether this introduces undue bias.

Incentives

C&K does not favour the use of incentives or reimbursement in kind, unless there are specific reasons for this to occur. Should the researcher wish to give recognition to the site for their participation, a contribution towards something of education value to the whole of the early childhood service is preferred. It is requested that there is prior consultation with the site about any contribution.

It is understood though that in some circumstances, incentives are necessary, where the time commitment for parents is burdensome or ongoing. Any incentives must be appropriate to an ECEC setting, including vouchers. Where participants go in a draw for a prize, full details of how this process will be conducted including timelines and the prize must be disclosed to participants prior to their participation.

Researcher credentials

Researchers must demonstrate the necessary qualifications, competence and experience to manage their research project including the management of unexpected situations. Additionally researchers must be aware of relevant ethical and legal obligations.

Researchers must produce evidence of a current Bluecard under the Working with Children Check where the research requires this. Researchers should check with the Blue Card Services about whether they require a Bluecard or an exemption, refer to <https://www.bluecard.qld.gov.au/> If a researcher is going into an early childhood service with a team of people, the principal or lead researcher must ensure all members of the team have up-to-date Bluecards and evidence must be provided of this with the application.

Researchers must be cognisant of their duty of care and one-on-one interviewing must take place in the presence or vicinity of another educator and/or responsible adult.

Burden

The collection of data in many instances can take a considerable amount of time and can divert attention from the core business of early childhood settings. Additionally, the administration of research projects may be burdensome for staff.

Any research proposal needs to document the specific commitment required of C&K including staff time (educators, central office staff etc) and access to any other resources; scheduling of research activities, and the level of disruption to programs. C&K reserves the right to say no to research, particularly where early childhood education and care sites are experiencing research fatigue, and/or at certain times in the ECEC calendar year.

Reporting on research

It is a condition of approval that the researcher provides a summary report on the study findings to C&K at the conclusion of the study. A suggested format is provided to researchers for this report. Researchers may need to consider providing an alternate report for children, where appropriate. C&K also requests that researchers acknowledge C&K in publications arising from the research.

Attachment 1 – C&K research and evaluation outcome areas

C&K’s research and evaluation program is grouped under research and evaluation outcome areas

Key research and evaluation outcome areas*	Types of indicative research and evaluation topics covered
1. Metrics to inform and support strategic decision making	Key early childhood statistics
2. Children’s environments are nurturing, culturally appropriate and safe	Child safe environments, peer relationships, racism/cultural appropriateness, child abuse and neglect, family violence
3. Children have the knowledge and skills for life and learning	Early learning, transition to school, social and emotional wellbeing
4. Children are engaged in and benefiting from educational opportunities	Literacy, numeracy, children’s rights and participation in learning and play, and research; pedagogical or internal flexibility of early learning programs, innovative programming, using technology
5. Families are confident and have the capability to support their children’s development	Family and community capacity building, family participation and engagement
6. Quality early childhood development services that support the choices of families	Quality of early childhood education and care services, accessibility of early childhood education and care services, workforce participation, broader family support needs
7. Early childhood education and care workforce is skilled, competent and supported	Recruitment and retention, managing stress, staff empowered to perform
8. Influencing policy and advocating for beneficial industry change	Responses to inquiries, industry hearings and other submissions submitted

*Outcome areas 2 – 6 adapted from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014. National outcome measures for early childhood development – phase 2: scoping paper. Cat. No. PHE 184. Canberra: AIHW.

Attachment 2 – A good research proposal

The Victorian Government publication, *Conducting research in Victorian government schools and early childhood settings*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, State Government of Victoria, January 2013 has modified a project description from a no longer available NHMRC publication, *Human Research Ethics Handbook – Commentary on the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (NHMRC 2001) regarding what is a good proposal.

The project

- Are the aims of the proposal clear?
- Is the research likely to yield new information, enhance understanding or clarify existing uncertainty?
- Has this, or similar, research been carried out before in the same, or similar, contexts?
- Can the research proposal be supported by a systematic review of the literature that demonstrates the importance of the research question and builds upon the results of previous research?
- Have the perspectives of potential participant groups and the wider community been incorporated into the research proposal?

The researchers

- Do the researchers have necessary qualifications, competence and experience?
- Are members of the research team aware of relevant ethical and legal obligations?

The funding

- What is the relationship between the source of funding and the aims of the project?
- Does that relationship have any implications for the ethical conduct of the project, especially the recruitment of participants, the character of information sought or the freedom to publish the results?

Research methodology

- Are all aspects of the research methodology clearly described?
- Is the methodology appropriate to the achievement of the aims of the project?

Recruitment of participants

- Is it clear how participants will be recruited?
- Do the recruitment methods respect participants' rights to confidentiality?
- Are the proposed participants appropriate in number and kind?

Burdens of research

- Are the burdens and risks of research to participants clearly identified and have appropriate measures been taken to minimise these?
- Is the balance between the burdens and risks to participants and the aims and benefits of the project such as to warrant approval?

Incentives for participation

- Are financial or other rewards proposed to be given to participants?
- Have issues such as coercion been considered?

Consent

- Are the ways in which participants will be approached clearly described?
- Is the information to be provided to potential participants adequate in content and appropriate in form?

- Do the proposed methods of securing consent to participate provide a) sufficient time to consider the decision; b) evidence that participants understood their choices, and c) sufficient opportunities to ask questions and re-consider?

Discontinuing participation

- Are the ways in which participants are advised of their freedom to withdraw sufficient in content and frequency?

Information protection

- Is it clear who will (and who will not) have access to information collected during the project?
- Are the proposed storage and security measures adequate?
- Are participants clearly informed that information they provide will be used only for the project?
- What measures are proposed to protect the confidentiality of information and the privacy of participants, during the study and in resulting publications, and are these adequate to give the degree of protection promised to participants?

Legal issues

- Does the project involve subject matter or conduct which may give rise to legal vulnerability of participants or researchers? Are adequate precautions to be taken?